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ABSTRACT

One of the biggest complaints shared by writing teachers is that students lack a sense of self. Writing handbooks and teachers are full of advice and exercises pointed at assisting students in finding their voice, their persona as writers. One method that may assist writing students in finding that voice would introduce students to spy fiction. Neglected by most academics as serious literature and ignored by writing instructors as a viable genre to enhance writing skills, spy fiction is actually a valuable tool in enhancing a student writer's sense of self by offering examples of writers establishing a persona in control of information. By introducing students to the spy and the spy master, instructors introduce students to a world in which knowledge is power and its disclosure directs how others act. Contrary to popular belief, espionage fiction does not focus on plot alone. It offers students an entire course in rhetorical issues. Spy fiction effectively explores establishing pathos and ethos as author by focusing on the concepts of trustworthiness, citizenship, and honesty. Though delving into complex theories of narrative is not appropriate for most undergraduate writing courses, studying spy fiction provides a rich source for narrative techniques. (Contains a list of spy fiction appropriate for the classroom and 16 references.) (TB)

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Crossing Canonical Boundaries: Espionage Fiction in the Writing Classroom

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Spying: the act of gaining and holding knowledge surreptitiously, the process of achieving advantage over others by remaining detached from them and yet cognizant of their activities, the contest of an emotional relationship in which one of the parties holds exclusive pieces of convert information about that relationship.

Introduction:

One of the biggest complaints shared by writing teachers in that students lack a sense of self. Writing handbooks and teachers are full of advice and exercises pointed at assisting students in finding their voice, their persona as writers. I would like to suggest one method that may assist writing students in finding that voice by introducing spy fiction to the writing classroom. Neglected by most academics as serious literature and ignored by

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writing instructors as a viable genre to enhance writing skills, spy fiction in actuality is a valuable tool in enhancing a student writer's sense of self by offering examples of writers establishing a persona in control of the information--as the above definition intimates--they have to offer. Perhaps by including spy fiction in the classroom we can enliven the student's position as double agent as both reader and writer.

Graham Greene and John le Carre suggest that the writer must always by a spy, must apply a superior kind of knowledge to the situation she creates while she fashions a means of ultimately providing, over time, full access to that knowledge for the reader. Much in the same way, say composition students, must offer a thesis and slowly divulge the crux of that argument and its supporting information. Spy fiction offers methods to approach several writing issues, including: questions of identity, rhetorical techniques, and narrative techniques.

Questions of Identity

Identity is an issue any writer, whether of fiction or non-fiction, must confront. The argument is an old one--how do we get student writers to transfer their knowledge to academic discourse. How do we enable students to transcend the dilemma of identity and learn to establish identities in any discourse community in which they must participate.

The Spy: "By virtue of his powers of action and decisive consequences, the spy....is glamorous. He represents an unattainable world of clear and decisive action, total control and perfect authority....When characters project an air of simple command in the labyrinth of the world's confusion, they emerge as romantic heroes" (Chance).

By introducing the character of the spy and the spy master, we introduce students to a world in which knowledge is power and its disclosure will direct how others act--persuaded to commit an action, convinced of an argument, entertained by the story. Whether or not they emerge as romantic heroes is not so important as the idea of authority--a critical issue for students who feel they have nothing important to say. Another basic of all spy fiction offers a modernistic, intensified, and sometimes, "real world" view of how to construct character in writing and in reality: the battle between us/them. Spy stories are often based on a battle between good and evil, necessarily implying two sets of beliefs where each side views the other as the "enemy" as "them." In addition, understanding which side they fight on is essential for spy characters because it helps them define their identity; they only sense of self an agent has is her sense of duty. By extending this metaphor to the writing classroom, students, who indeed often view writing academic discourse as an "us" versus "them" scenario, students can learn to adapt to their "mission."

Rhetorical Techniques

Contrary to popular belief, espionage fiction does not focus on plot alone. This genre offers students an entire course in rhetorical issues. In fact, I have used Sharon Crowley's *Ancient Rhetoric for Modern Students* as a companion text to my course. Spy fiction effectively explores establishing pathos and ethos as author by focusing on the concepts of trustworthiness, citizenship, honesty. Ethics is another concern of espionage. In addition to questioning the idea of a battle between good and evil, other ethical questions emerge when students are faced with the idea of motive--what motivated one to fight for a cause, do institutions or individuals always have the right intentions motivating their actions, what are "right intentions"--honor--is it always honorable to fight for a cause even if it is against your better judgment--justice--who determines the definition of justice and who administrates it--and heroism--what is a hero. There are numerous other avenues to be explored; for example, the use of metaphor and Aristotle's common topics for invention strategies.

Narrative Techniques

Though delving into complex theories of narrative is not appropriate for most undergraduate writing courses, studying spy fiction provides a rich source for narrative techniques. For instance, students often recognize that chronology is an important aspect in presenting their argument, but how to arrange chronologically is another matter. Espionage fiction supplies various narrative scenarios, such as historical reconstruction and moving time forward to prepare readers for a future action. Spy

fiction also questions the reliability of the narrator which is not only a useful tool for critical readings but also forces students to judge the reliability of the persona they create. Since most works of spy fiction involve many characters, students are introduced to the idea of multiple narrators. The many voiced, multiple point of view narrative demonstrates to students how one author has the ability to create many personas, may selves. This makes for a particularly useful classroom writing exercise in audience analysis and stylistic technique.

Conclusion

I am by no means intimating that all freshman composition classrooms should incorporate spy novels. Instead I am suggesting a method which can be utilized to open the door for students who may benefit from such role playing metaphors that espionage fiction has to offer.

Espionage Novels

Below is a list of representative spy fiction that works well in the writing classroom for discussing issues of theme, rhetorical techniques, and identity

Tom Clancy	Hunt for Red October
Joseph Conrad	The Secret Agent
James Fenimore Cooper	The Spy
Len Deighton	Berlin Game; Mexico Set; London Match
Graham Greene	The Power and the Glory; Our Man in Havana; The Quiet American; The Human Factor; The Confidential Agent

Ian Fleming	Casino Royale
Ken Follett	Eye of the Needle
Carlos Fuentes	The Hydra Head
John Le Carre	A Perfect Spy; Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy; The Spy Who Came in From the Cold
Helen MacInnes	Ride a Pale Horse
W. Somerset Maughm	Ashenden

Criticism

I have also included a list of secondary criticism addressing spy fiction and fiction is the writing classroom

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